

THE 125th ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY¹

Charles E. Mason²

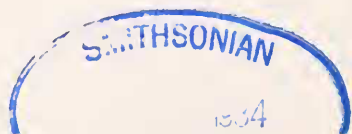
ABSTRACT: The American Entomological Society (AES) recently celebrated its 125th anniversary with a commemorative meeting held February 15, 1984, at The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. The AES is the oldest entomological society that has been in continuous existence in the western hemisphere. It has a rich history and was instrumental in the development of entomology as a science in the United States. This paper, which was presented at the meeting, gives a brief overview of the history of the AES and its impact on the development of American entomology. The paper also serves as an introduction to other papers presented at the commemorative meeting on key aspects of the history of the society. These other papers are published in this issue of *Entomological News*, in the sequence in which they were presented.

It is particularly fitting that The American Entomological Society have its 125th anniversary commemorative meeting on February 15, 1984. For it was just the day before this day, 125 years ago on February 14, 1859, that Ezra T. Cresson, James Ridings and George Newman got together and decided to form an entomological society. On February 15, 1859, an invitation was sent from these three gentlemen to 16 other persons asking them to attend a meeting on February 22 to discuss establishing a society for the purpose of advancing the study of insects. It is noteworthy that the fiftieth anniversary commemorative meeting was held February 15, 1909, which featured a talk on the history of The American Entomological Society presented by one of the founders, Ezra T. Cresson.

The society was originally named The Entomological Society of Philadelphia. After eight years, on February 23, 1867, its name was changed to The American Entomological Society. The name was changed because at the time it was the only society in the United States devoted entirely to the study of entomology and it had published the *Proceedings* since 1861 which was one of the earliest publications devoted to insects. Also, this publication had received wide recognition. Upon changing the society name, the *Proceedings* was changed to *Transactions of The American Entomological Society*, and was first published under this title in June 1867. It has continued without interruption in publication to the present.

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It is believed that The American Entomological Society is the oldest entomological society that has been in continuous existence in the Western Hemisphere. The Society serves as the American birth place for the cultural development of entomology as a science. In many ways The American Entomological Society has contributed a great deal to the heritage of entomology in the United States. For many years it was the only entomological society in the United States that had interests continental in scope.

From the very beginning its founders were committed to the advancement of entomology as a science. They saw the need for publication of observations and new knowledge about insects; they saw the value of a good insect collection, especially representing insects of North America; they saw the need for a complete library of entomological literature; and finally they saw the importance of having financial stability in the form of contributions and endowments to ensure that these goals would be carried out. The society today still maintains these commitments. It has three publications, the *Transactions*, *Entomological News* and *Memoirs*, all well known throughout the world. The insect collection is also well known. It is maintained by The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and is well represented with Orthoptera, Coleoptera, Hymenoptera and other specific insect taxa. The library, also maintained by the Academy, has over 15,000 volumes on entomology. Because of several bequests made to the society throughout its history, the capital assets now exceed \$350,000. The income from these endowments is used to supplement the cost of publications, to purchase entomological books and periodicals for its library and to cover general operating expenses of the society's office located in the academy building at 19th and Race Streets.

The American Entomological Society was the first to publish a journal devoted to economic entomology. *The Practical Entomologist* was initiated as the second journal of the society in 1865. This publication included short papers of popular aspects of entomology and was distributed among farmers and other agriculturalists. However, it was started before a need for this type of publication was fully recognized and appreciated by the public. Due to lack of support *The Practical Entomologist* was not published after 1867.

During the period following 1867, the emphasis of interest by members and the types of articles in the publications of The American Entomological Society were in the basic rather than applied aspects of entomology. Much was published in its journals in the areas of systematics, morphology, biology and ecology. As the field of entomology advanced, new subdivisions developed in the discipline, particularly in the applied areas. These included chemical control, biological control and insects as vectors of

disease, just to name a few. Because of the growth throughout the field of entomology, other entomological societies developed along the way, some with the encouragement of The American Entomological Society.

The formation of the Entomological Society of America, currently the largest entomological society located in North America, had its roots in Philadelphia in conjunction with The American Entomological Society. Several members of The American Entomological Society were instrumental in the early stages of organizing the Entomological Society of America. There was a joint meeting held December 19, 1904, at The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. The meeting included members of The American Entomological Society, the Association of Economic Entomologists, the Entomological Section of the Academy and The Feldman Collecting Social. Dr. P.P. Calvert, then president of The American Entomological Society, was made chairman of the joint meeting and Dr. Henry Skinner, then recording secretary of the Society, was made secretary of the joint meeting. Dr. Calvert led the discussion at this meeting on the need for having a national entomological society that would be truly American in nature and which would represent the interests of all aspects of entomological science. Dr. J. Chester Bradley, a resident member of The American Entomological Society, moved that a committee be appointed to consider the organization of an American society in which all branches of entomology would be represented. The committee, consisting of J.C. Bradley, H.T. Fernald and E.D. Sanderson, was selected to pursue the matter. Dr. Bradley reported in the Nov. 1906 issue of *Entomological News* on the formation of the Entomological Society of America.

The relationship between The American Entomological Society and The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia has been germane to the survival of the society. Without the support of the academy in providing office space, curatorial services, library facilities and meeting rooms, The American Entomological Society would have had difficulty in maintaining a continued existence. The society owes a great deal of gratitude to the academy for the support received. In turn the academy has benefited from its association with The American Entomological Society through contributions to the library and insect collections and through the publication of articles in journals of the society.

It is gratifying to be a member of The American Entomological Society and realize its rich history. Its founders were on the right track in establishing a society in 1859 for the purpose of advancing knowledge about insects. Before that time, little was known about insects other than that there were a lot of them. Now, 125 years later, we have thousands of volumes of information on insects. This is a short period of time when you think of it in terms of two times the age of a 62.5 year old person, which is a little less than the average life span. Without a doubt, The American Entomological

Society has played a major role in the advancement of entomology as a science during the past 125 years.

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COMMUNICATION

February 8, 1984

Dr. Charles Mason, President
The American Entomological Society

Dear Dr. Mason,

Congratulations to you and The American Entomological Society on its 125th Anniversary. I regret that a previous commitment prevents me from attending.

The Academy recognizes the crucial role that The American Entomological Society has played in the development of entomological study at this institution. We are particularly grateful for the donation of the society's entire collection and for the use of your library, which is the finest in the world.

We are proud of our association during these 125 years. The American Entomological Society has reflected credit and favor on the Academy.

Sincerely,

Howard P. Brokaw
Chairman of the Board
The Academy of Natural Sciences
of Philadelphia

SOCIETY MEETING OF FEBRUARY 15, 1984

The 125th Anniversary of the founding of The American Entomological Society was celebrated at The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia on Wednesday evening, February 15, 1984. Twenty members and twelve guests attended the special program devoted to the history of the society. The American Entomological Society is the oldest continuously-operating entomological society in the Western Hemisphere.

President Charles E. Mason called the ceremonies to order and had each member of the audience introduce himself. He then read several letters of congratulations from members and dignitaries who were unable to attend. Most fitting was a \$125 contribution from Dr. Charles Hodge IV to be used for the purchase of a book or something of lasting value. Dr. Mason continued with an account of the founding of the society.

The society's library of approximately 15,000 volumes is integrated with the library of The Academy of Natural Sciences. This collection of entomological works is one of the finest such collections in the country and is particularly noted for its many rare 19th century volumes. Howard P. Boyd, editor of *Entomological News* and former president of the society, recounted how the library began its growth with the founding of the society and eventually became so large and valuable that it was moved to the academy in 1876. The long and sometimes rocky association between the society and academy was told with irony and humor.

About the time of the transfer of the USDA Beneficial Insects Laboratory to the University of Delaware in 1973, the society began to hold some of its meetings in Newark, Delaware. To many this was thought to be the first Newark-Philadelphia connection in the society. Dr. William H. Day, chairman of the society's finance committee and former president dispelled that illusion. Thomas B. Wilson, M.D. (1807-1865), a founder of The American Entomological Society, was a resident of Newark, Delaware. In addition to being a major benefactor of the society and the academy, contributing thousands of volumes to their libraries and financing major expansions to house his donated collections, he was also intimately associated with the development of what was to become the University of Delaware. His brother, with whom he lived, was president of that fledgling academic institution for 11 years. It is a quirk of fate that T.B. Wilson died from typhus, a disease which was later found to be transmitted by insects.

Another founder of the society was Ezra Townsend Cresson. He served the society in a variety of important positions for 67 years. In that he married Mary Ann Ridings, daughter of another of the society's founders, it is understandable that his two sons E. T., Jr. and George B. Cresson were entomologists associated with the society. Roger W. Fuester, recording secretary of the society, discussed the contributions of the Cresson family. Although the family was involved with the society for 89 years, none ever served as president. It is reported that the elder Cresson actively discouraged nomination to that position.

The *Transactions* of the The American Entomological Society is one of three periodicals published by the society. The current editor, Dr. Daniel Otte, presented an analysis of the importance of the *Transactions* in describing the diversity of insect life. Over 16,000 species and 1000 genera have been described in this publication. A curious dip in the descriptions of new taxa in the *Transactions* during the 1950's prompted considerable discussion and speculation among society's members.

Philip P. Calvert, long-time editor of *Entomological News*, first attended an American Entomological Society meeting at the age of 16 in 1887. He was president in 1909 when the society celebrated its 50th anniversary and he lived to participate in the 100th anniversary. His 74-year association with the society is probably a record. Dr. Harold B. White, corresponding secretary of the society, spoke about the important role the society and the academy played in the preprofessional development of Philip Calvert. He suggested that we should learn from our history and in the future realize our potential for exciting and sustaining

the interest of budding entomologists.

The final presentation of the evening was about James A.G. Rehn by Dr. Selwyn S. Roback, editor of the *Memoirs* of The American Entomological Society. Dr. Roback, a personal friend of Mr. Rehn, cited Rehn's many contributions and great dedication to the society. This presentation and others commemorating the 125th anniversary are published in extended form in this issue of *Entomological News*.

In addition to the formal presentations, there were displays of many early photographs, publications and memorabilia from the archives of The Academy of Natural Sciences. These were expertly presented by Mrs. Carol Spawn, academy archivist with the assistance of Mrs. Mildred Morgan, society secretary. Mrs. Morgan capped the delightful meeting by presenting President Mason with a new gavel to replace the one that apparently has been lost.

Harold B. White,
Corresponding Secretary

COMMUNICATION

February 15, 1984

To The President and Council of The American Entomological Society:

On the occasion of the American Entomological Society's 125th anniversary, The Academy of Natural Sciences, and its staff, Board of Trustees, and membership, send greetings and best wishes.

We congratulate the American Entomological Society for 125 years of uninterrupted contributions of research and scholarship in the science of entomology; for a distinguished record of publication; for its continuing efforts in fostering interest in and dedication to the science of entomology among many generations of scientists of America.

The ties between The American Entomological Society and The Academy of Natural Sciences are long-standing. May this historic association continue to flourish throughout this century and the next.

Thomas Peter Bennett
President
The Academy of Natural Sciences
of Philadelphia